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ABSTRACT

Through a Pennsylvania statewide curriculum integration project involving 11 school districts, this research examines the curriculum reform process and determines which factors, or combination of factors, are absolutely essential for successful curriculum reform. Comparing programs and their respective levels of success makes it clear that only a subset of factors are essential elements. The research used a qualitative, multisite, modified analytic induction design. Twenty-three factors thought to be essential for curriculum reform were identified, and a systematic curriculum integration framework was developed for use in the 11 districts. The factors were categorized into: (1) resources; (2) teacher teaming; (3) administrative involvement; (4) curriculum issues; and (5) communication. Exploration of these areas shows that resources are an essential component, and that all involved need to find creative ways to reallocate both financial and human resources. Teacher teaming is another necessary and evolving process, because shared ownership is crucial to success. Administrative involvement is basic to the success of the team. Curriculum revisions drive the reform process, and they must express clear goals that are owned by everyone. Communication to all constituencies is another essential. (Contains 1 figure and 10 references.) (SLD)

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Objectives

As many school districts across the country are undertaking significant curriculum reform initiatives, particularly in the area of curriculum integration, knowledge of factors that enhance their chances of success becomes increasingly important. About 23 different factors can be found in the literature that are related to human and financial resources, various teacher and administrator characteristics, along with a number of team-building issues that suggest success can only be attained when all of these factors are firmly in place. Yet several school districts studied have demonstrated their capacity to successfully initiate and sustain curriculum reform in less than ideal circumstances.

Through a statewide curriculum integration project involving 11 school districts, this research examines the curriculum reform process and determines which factors, or combination of factors, are absolutely essential for successful curriculum reform. By comparing programs and their respective levels of success, it is clear that although a number of these characteristics, if in place, enhance success (enablers), only a subset of these factors are essential elements (disablers).

Theoretical Framework

Fragmentation, lack of relevance, and an inability to teach students what they need to succeed in the future are all criticisms that have recently been leveled at our schools. To help improve what is perceived as shortcomings in the educational system, many districts are undertaking significant curriculum and instructional reform efforts, many of which are centered around curriculum integration. The success of individual programs that implemented curriculum integration in their schools has been reported in a number of research articles (e.g., Peters, et al., 1995; Williams & Reynolds, 1993; Wepner, 1993). Sources are available to provide guidance for educators who are interested in developing integrated units of study (e.g., Fogarty, 1991; Lounsbury, Ed., 1992). There is literature delineating the roles of teachers and administrators in school reform (e.g., Page, 1994; Patterson, 1993; Bredeson, 1992) as well as what is necessary for providing a successful organizational climate (e.g., Osbourne, 1993; Fullan, 1991). This previous literature has provided a variety of viewpoints from which to evaluate the factors that contribute to successful curriculum reform. Rarely, however, are districts able to have all of those components in place. Assessing the relative importance of these tangible and intangible factors and determining which factors simply enhance the chances of success (enablers) and which factors are crucial to success (disablers) is an important step toward widespread, systemic curriculum reform.

Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative, multi-site, modified analytic induction design. Based upon previous research, factors thought to be necessary for successful curriculum reform were identified and a systematic curriculum integration framework was developed. This framework was

the basis for a series of site-visit observations and interviews of teachers, administrators and students in 11 districts across Pennsylvania that sought to explain what combination of factors, both tangible and intangible, were most important in successful curriculum reform efforts. Data were collected using an interview format based upon the common factors found in the literature. The interview format was modified slightly as new cases contributed to a greater understanding of factors contributing to successful curriculum reform. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Data Source

Eleven districts across the state of Pennsylvania were visited in fall 1995 and spring 1996 and 70 teachers and administrators along with 25 students were interviewed. All districts were participating in the Keystone Integrated Framework Project, a federally funded curriculum integration initiative focusing on the integration of the arts, history, civics, English, and geography. The school districts included in the study represented rural, suburban, and urban schools. The schools' programs ranged from self-contained classes spanning the entire school year, to teams of teachers teaching thematic units. Schools included in the project represented elementary, middle/junior high, and high school grade levels.

Results

This study examined 23 individual factors noted in the literature as important to successful curriculum integration initiatives (see Table 1). These factors can be categorized into five areas: Resources, Teacher Teaming, Administrative Involvement, Curriculum Issues, and Communication.

Across all interviews, the 23 factors were found to be enablers--that is, factors that, if in place, enhance the process and provide the greatest opportunity for success. However, contrary to the literature, not all of these factors were found to be absolutely necessary for success. A number of districts had exciting, successful programs even though many of the factors were absent. As it turns out though, there are certain factors without which the curriculum integration efforts were significantly diminished or doomed to failure (disablers). The following sections discuss the findings in each of the five areas.

Resources. The area of resources dealt with issues that had a direct impact on human and/or financial resources. Examples include release time for teachers, direct expenditures for materials, costs associated with professional development, staffing implications for creating schedules that allow for common planning time and common students for team members. This is a significant area that requires all concerned to find ways to creatively re-allocate resources. Aspects of ongoing curriculum integration often require the expenditure of funds or have staffing implications and consequently necessitate both central office and building-level administrative support.

Probably the most significant factor in this area is time. It is the elusive element in less successful curriculum integration efforts. Where teachers were not provided with common planning time by the district, some programs struggled to be successful. However, in the case of a few very focused teams, planning time was "created" by meeting over lunch, and before or after school on a very regular basis. The districts that were most successful placed a priority on working planning time into their days and demonstrated a commitment to the success of the project by redesigning schedules in ways to create the necessary common times. In one school, for example, the schedule was designed in such a way that all children at one grade level had classes with special teachers (i.e.,

art, music, physical education, etc.) during the same period. As a result, the regular classroom teachers were able to meet periodically as a team. The unfortunate side of this rescheduling, however, is that the special teachers were not included in the team meeting. Although not ideal, the new schedule was a step in the right direction and demonstrated administrative commitment to the process. In another school, class sizes were increased slightly to allow for one fewer scheduled period every other day--this period became the team planning time. As one administrator said, "You simply have *got* to give teachers time among themselves to sit down and plan during the school. It is unrealistic to expect them to do it all on their own time."

While all sites were given the same amount of grant funds, those sites that were most successful used a greater portion of the funds to purchase released time for teachers; the less successful sites tended to purchase "things" (e.g., books, computer programs, supplies, etc.) rather than time. The observed difference among the sites in this regard was clear. Teachers used this released time to meet in teams, to attend professional development activities, and to make presentations to others (colleagues, board members, parents, and the community) about their successes. In addition, the most successful sites also received additional resources from the central administration. There were a small number of teams that sought out and received external grant funding ranging from $500 to $25,000. These funds were used to augment existing curriculum and provide opportunities for planning and instruction that would otherwise not have occurred.

While districts should attempt to provide for each of the factors in this area, providing time was clearly the disabling factor for the less successful sites.

Teacher Teaming. This area focused on issues related to the working relationships and commitment of the teachers involved in the project. Specifically, cooperation among teachers,

personal commitment to integrating the curriculum on the part of teachers, and the empowerment of teachers to design, shape, and implement curricular change. The size of the team, its shared vision (i.e., philosophy), volunteer status and leadership were also considered.

Personal commitment on the part of the teachers is crucial to this type of curriculum reform. Perhaps it is one of the most intriguing factors as it is clear that a "chemistry" that is difficult to quantify needs to exist among team members. Teams with the most successful projects were characterized by excellent cooperation and a feeling of collegiality. They seemed to get along well both at school and socially. It was clear that these teachers had contact with one another beyond the school day. The less successful teams, however, seemed to have not contact beyond normal school hours. In discussing the bond among team members, one teacher stated "I think we've always had good relationships but I think we've become closer and bond more now because we're in this together. It's been fun, it really has!" A central office administrator characterized the teaming concept succinctly by saying, "What it boils down to is the ability of people to work and interact together as a collective unit." Without the collective trust and collegiality, curriculum integration seems doomed from the start. The importance of team building should not be underestimated. The benefits not only ensure greater success in curriculum reform efforts but also may have a re-energizing effect on teachers.

> "I don't feel isolated as a classroom teacher anymore. I felt really strong professional relationships were established and that input was given back and forth between people that never before even came into my classroom. I found myself teaching art lessons and the art teacher found herself teaching about writing. It was a nice blend rather than always being isolated--a really nice comraderie developed among us."

While each of the factors in this area contributed to successful teams, a lack of commitment, empowerment, or a common philosophy derailed the initiative in less successful districts. One of the most successful sites in the project spent the entire first year building the commitment and developing a common philosophy, while all the time empowering teachers to make changes. Sites that did not have these three factors in common were destined to be less successful.

Administrative Involvement. It is often thought that strong instructional leadership on the part of the building principal is essential for curricular change. This area focused on issues related to the leadership provided by the building principal in addition to central office personnel. Where sites were most successful, administrators at all levels were willing to share decision-making responsibility with the teacher teams. Not only were these administrators supportive, but they were also actively involved in the process.

But building level administrative involvement was not sufficient. Although in the most successful sites, the superintendent was knowledgeable about the project and its goals, sites that did not have the active support and involvement of the district curriculum director were far less successful than those who did. At both the building and central office levels, being merely supportive was not sufficient. Administrators needed to play an active role.

Curriculum Issues. This area focused on those issues related directly to the district's curriculum. Three specific issues were of interest: the extent to which clear goals had been specified and understood by the team members; whether or not the team was able to work within the existing curriculum framework or found it necessary to undergo significant revisions; and finally, the extent to which teams understood and utilized existing models of curriculum integration.

The most successful sites clearly had very specific goals for their projects. One site reported, "The very first thing we did was to figure out exactly what we wanted to accomplish." It seemed a very logical, common sense thing to do yet was a very deliberate part of the process. The less successful sites, on the other hand, were characterized by a good bit of initial confusion. In a school where teachers were less clear of the goals, one stated, "I was confused in the beginning because I didn't know what the focus was supposed to be." Such reports were common place among these sites.

The more successful sites incorporated as much as possible of their existing curriculum into their integrated units. They tried to "fit some existing areas together first" and are "...building more each year" into their units. They have not expended energy and resources on making major changes to the curriculum, but focused their energies on designed integrated units and instruction around current content and available materials. In contrast, although the less successful sites intended to utilize the existing curriculum, they found themselves creating a host of new materials and incorporating new content. Because of the tremendous amounts of time expended in this manner, the less productive sites were less focused and became more weary of the process.

Communication. Communicating about curriculum reform efforts clearly distinguished successful from unsuccessful sites. In districts where curriculum integration was becoming an integral part of the district's reform efforts, teacher teams and administrators made a concerted effort to communicate the goals and objectives, methods, and outcomes with other constituencies. Teams made presentations to their colleagues during district in-service days. There was significantly improved and more frequent communication between teachers and administrators. Presentations were made to board members by both teachers and students to keep them apprised of the progress

being made. Letters and news bulletins were sent home to parents and frequent coverage of school activities were published by the local newspapers. In short, by keeping all constituencies well informed, greater support and understanding was generated.

Educational Importance

Integrating the curriculum is a major thrust in school reform efforts. Given the expense of these efforts and the consequences of failure, every effort should be made to ensure success. This research indicates the relative importance of often cited factors contributing to success in curriculum integration efforts. It is apparent that districts will be better able to effect curriculum reform by concentrating on the factors most important to success. Most importantly, this research identifies factors that, if not in place, will disable the process.

- **Resources** are required. All involved need to find creative ways to re-allocate resources, both financial and human, that are essential to ensure success without significantly increasing costs. Time is the single most important element. Teams need time together during the school day to plan, implement and reflect.

- **Teacher Teaming** is a necessary and evolving process that requires everyone to be a part of the it; shared ownership is crucial to success. All involved need to recognize the absolute necessity of forming teams of teachers who believe that curriculum integration can make a real difference for their students and who share a common vision.

- **Administrative Involvement** is basic to the success of the team. Administrators need to provide creative solutions to the unique challenges of curriculum integration and must plan the necessary time to stay actively involved in the project.

- **Curriculum Revisions** drive the process. For those revisions to become systemic reforms, clear goals that are owned by everyone involved are essential. They keep everyone on track and focused to help assure the highest levels of accomplishment.

- **Communication** to all constituencies is necessary. Effective communication promotes team work among teachers, fosters administrative support, provides for informed decision-making by the board, and keeps the community informed.

Figure 1

Factors Contributing to Institutionalizing Curriculum Integration

Factors
Resources
Common team planning time
Professional Development
Money
Common kids
Released Time to Meet and Plan
Teacher Teaming
Cooperation among teachers
Personal commitment on the part of teachers
Empowering teachers to design, shape, implement curricular change
Team size
Team philosophy
Team volunteers
Team leadership
Administrator Involvement
Building Administrator Involvement
Central Office Involvement
Superintendent Involvement
Curriculum Issues
Clear goals
Curriculum revisions
Curriculum model utilized (specific)
Communication
Other Teachers
Administrators
Board Members
Parents
Community

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